

Forgiveness



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The English poet Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human, to forgive, divine." His wit captures an essential aspect of our earthly sojourn which was also addressed by Paul, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Ro 3:23, and *"For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish."* Ro 7:19 When we're honest with ourselves, we know that we're prone to goof up, to fall short, to err. Sometimes we even defy the very "good" that we desire and transgress God's law. But as disciples of Jesus, that isn't what we want and is not how we strive to live. We want to please our heavenly Father, yet when we displease Him, we desperately want and need His forgiveness.

Which would you rather have, justice or mercy? Etched in our national identity is the concept of "liberty and justice for all." Justice carries with it the concept of equality and the idea of equal access to what we deserve. However, let me suggest that receiving what we deserve is not always what we need, or even want. What if we do something wrong and our action deserves punishment? Do we really want what we deserve? When we think this through, don't we really want mercy and leniency? And closely associated with this, we want the forgiveness that heals and restores vital relationships.

As Christians, we understand that forgiveness lies at the heart of our salvation and is truly a divine characteristic. However, as important as forgiveness is, it isn't a universal "spiritual" concept. Idolatrous sacrifice was/is primarily offered to appease an angry deity or seek some favor. Such practices are very much alive today in Hindu and ancestral worship. Forgiveness was never a pagan virtue, and is not a central tenant of most world religions even to-

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day. A forgiving spirit is often regarded as weakness and a person seeking forgiveness is seen as being in a subservient position, seeking that to which he has no right. The idea of a loving God graciously forgiving our trespasses and sins is truly a profound concept; as is the obligation to forgive those who trespass against us.

Sin is fundamentally contrary to God's character and nature, and His holiness is so pure that no sinner can come into His presence. Isaiah said, *"your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God."* Isa 59:2 Sin deserves divine punishment. Ezekiel went directly to the heart of the matter when he wrote, *"The soul who sins will die."* Eze 18:4 Thankfully, He who is holy, is also He who is gracious.

The remedy for sin is costly. Two conditions are necessary for God to forgive our sins. First, a life must be taken to pay the price for the guilt of the sinner. It is true that we cannot come into His holy presence while laden with our sins, yet this loving God also made provision to have our sins forgiven so that we could enter in and be recognized as His children. Paul wrote, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."* Rom 5:8-9 and *"God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were*

dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Eph 2:4-5 God paid the price for our sin by the sacrifice of His Son. John wrote, *"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* 1Jn 4:9-10

Forgiveness restores a mutual relationship and requires the cooperation of both parties. The effect of forgiveness is to restore to its former state the relationship which was broken by sin. There must therefore be both a granting and an acceptance of forgiveness. The second condition of forgiveness is repentance, which addresses our part in coming to His propitiatory sacrifice. Perhaps the single most difficult thing required of God's children is to come to His gracious gift with a broken and contrite spirit. The Psalmist wrote, *"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* Ps 34:18

Normally the person who wrongs another (the offending party) is responsible for approaching the offended party and paying the penalty to reestablish a relationship. Even though we have sinned against God, it is He who graciously paid the terrible price for our guilt. Our responsibility is to accept His proffer of forgive-

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ness with a penitent heart. Paul wrote the Corinthians, *“I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it — for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while — I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God . . . for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”* 2Co 7:8-10 We must be genuinely sorrowful for our sinful actions – this is costly because it goes against our prideful, willful nature. However, a broken and contrite spirit, sorrowfully admitting failure and vowing to turn away from our sinful practices, is exactly what our Father demands to reestablish the relationship. With such a heart God is more than willing to forgive and remember our sins no more. Yet if we persist in doing what we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want – we’re like the prodigal son when he demanded his inheritance and went away to squander it in riotous living (Lu 15). God wants us to “come to ourselves” like this young man eventually did and sorrowfully come to repentance. Like the prodigal’s father, God longs to forgive and welcome us home.

Phil Lumpkin



God’s Forgiving Nature

Russ Ward

“The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” II Peter 3:9] How often we use this verse to teach and convince people lost in sin that unless they repent and turn from their current situation in life, the Day of Judgment described by Peter in the previous verses will be one of destruction. What should speak to all who read and re-read these verses is that God’s wish would be that **none perish**.

John says that *“.. God is light and in him is no darkness at all.”* I John 1:5 Paul, to the Church in Rome, stated *“..for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* Romans 3:23 and John in I John 1:8 *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* Simply put God has no desire for man to be separated from him, yet He has no allowance or tolerance for the unrighteousness found in man.

On the one hand, we have God intent to remove that which is abominable to His nature, yet we find He is willing to provide a venue of restoration through forgiveness of the very thing (sin) which makes man an abomination before Him. Such is the nature of God’s forgiveness of mankind and such is the struggle mankind has found in understanding this aspect of God. We

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don't struggle with the thought that a God out of love would forgive man, what we struggle with is the nature of God's forgiveness under his terms and conditions because they do not match our own and they do not fit within our mindset.

Conditions of God's Forgiving Nature

In his time of weakness David understood the nature of Jehovah. He said it best in Psalms 51:17 *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise."* Moses spoke to the elders of Israel when he had come to end of his journey and warned them that they out of weakness would forget God, but that God would restore the faithful who would turn back to Him and observe the commandments which God had given them through Moses. (Deut 30) John commands that *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* | John 1:9.

Forgiveness is available to all, but is not given to all, nor is it given to all who ask. Forgiveness is and always has been conditional. God simply requires one to stop, turn, and obey. Stop whatever has separated you from Jehovah, turn back to God, and obey his commands. The same was true under the Law of Moses as is true today under the Law of Christ.

Consequences of Sin and God's Forgiving Nature

Although man is the recipient of God's

forgiveness, the physical consequences of sin are not always set aside when forgiveness is given. We want everything to be right or put back in place with God's forgiveness. When Moses struck the rock at the waters of Meribah (Num 20:8-12) God commanded that neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the land of Canaan. Even as Moses entreated the Lord, Jehovah told Moses *"..Enough, speak to me no more of this matter...see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan.."* Deut. 3: 23-27 David on two occasions suffered severe consequences from his sin. Instead of his death by law, he lost the child of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba (II Sam 12:13-15) and seventy thousand plus died after he had taken the census of the people. (II Sam. 24:15) The conversion of Onesimus and subsequent remission of his sins did not absolve him of returning to Philemon, nor remove the consequences of his actions.

God is ready and willing to forgive, but His forgiveness does not always remove the consequences that one's sins have brought to bear.

Benefits of God's Forgiving Nature

Now if forgiveness does not accomplish all one wishes it to, then where are the benefits of turning back to the Lord in obedience? Ask the individual whose heart has truly turned back to God. David knew that God's delight and acceptance of sacrifice came only after repentance and turning

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back to God. (Psalms 51: 16-19) Moses told the children of Israel that God would have compassion on them and restore, prosper, and multiply them in the Land that He had promised. (Deut. 30:1-6) John tells the Christian that forgiveness provides a cleansing of all unrighteousness. [1 John 1-9]

“O Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Rom.7:24-25]



God Forgives His People

Carol Fertig

In Mathew 18:21-22, Jesus told Peter that we should forgive a brother who sins against us not up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. In other words, as often as it is needed, forgiveness should be extended. God extended such forgiveness to His people over and over. Many examples of His continual forgiveness are recorded for us in scripture. God punished Adam and Eve’s sin, but forgave it and allowed them to live and to learn to trust and have faith in Him (Genesis 4:1, 26). He considered destroying His people when they corrupted themselves with the golden calf while Moses was on Sinai receiving the law (Genesis 32:10). Because Moses pled for the people, God forgave them. The period of the judges is one long

cycle of disobedience, repentance, forgiveness, then disobedience again. Seventy times seven – over and over -- God forgave His people.

One whom God forgave was David. David was singled out for greatness early in his life. He seemed to be charmed: he killed Goliath, found favor with Saul, escaped Saul when he turned and wanted to kill David. He conquered God’s enemies and claimed the land for His people. It was David’s lineage which would bring Messiah to save God’s people, yet David was human and he sinned. How God must have grieved when the “one after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) first committed adultery, then murdered to cover it, then lied about the whole affair. David’s attitude when convicted of his sins by Nathan is expressed in Psalm 51:4:

*Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned,
And done what is evil in Thy sight, So
that Thou art justified when Thou dost
speak, And blameless when Thou dost
judge.*

David was punished by the death of his child with Bathsheba and by not getting to build the temple, but God forgave him and used him in His saving plan for His people. Reading the Psalms written by David through inspiration, we feel how completely the relationship between God and David was restored:

How blessed is he whose transgression

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is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!

How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.

An astounding example of God's forgiving His people was on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Twice, at His baptism and at His transfiguration, God verbalized for man's benefit that Jesus was indeed His Son. He let us know that not only was Jesus His Son (His only Son), but that He was "well-pleased" with Him (Matthew 3:17), and that He was a "beloved" Son (Mark 9:7) and that we should "listen to Him." (Mt 17:5). Imagine God's pain when the vicious mob cried out for Jesus to be crucified! But even this travesty God forgave. As David was dismayed by the sin he had committed, so were the Jews when Peter convinced them they had killed God's precious Son. Listen to what they said to Peter when he finished his sermon: *"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to*

the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37. Peter assured them by saying, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" Acts 2:38. What a blessing that we can receive forgiveness when we sin, just as those Peter addressed did when they repented and obeyed. We all need to rely on the seventy times seven from our longsuffering Father (Romans 3:23), and He is willing to extend it lovingly to us.



Jesus' Sacrifice for Our Forgiveness

John Ledbetter

Jesus' sacrifice is very near and dear to me. Jesus shed His precious blood for all mankind, but even if you and I were the only ones in the world He would have died for us. Jesus' sacrifice was the ransom paid to deliver mankind from the bondage of sin (Matthew 20:28). In Colossians 1:13 we read, *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."*

The sacrificial death of Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Titus 1:2 reads, *"In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began."* The first Messianic prophecy occurred in the garden of Eden,

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“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” Genesis 3:15. Isaiah prophesied of Christ’s sacrifice seven hundred and fifty years before His crucifixion in Isaiah 53:10-12, *“For He shall bear their iniquities. . . because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, makes three things possible:

- (1) Forgiveness to the faithful of Old Testament times (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:15)
- (2) Forgiveness today (Rom 3:26; Mat 26:28; 1 John 1:7).
- (3) God is both “just and justifier” – fair and forgiving – in that He satisfies His avenging justice while offering mankind a way of escape from the guilt of sin (Rom 3:26; Heb 10:28-31).

God chose to give us redemption through Christ’s blood, *“In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”* Eph 1:7 Paul also spoke of our forgiveness in Christ in Colossians 1:14, *“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”* Out of Christ there is nothing; in Him is eternal life. Out of Christ there is condemnation; in Him is redemption. Out of Christ there is guilt; in Him are forgiveness, pardon and

salvation.

Man separates himself from God by his own sins, *“... your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”* Isa 59:2 God through the riches of His grace prepared the means by which man can justly be redeemed, forgiven of sins and returned to fellowship with Him. Through the blood of Christ the just penalty for sin is paid (Isa 53:1-7; 2 Cor 5:21). God’s objective in sending Jesus was to reconcile all things to Himself. The medium of reconciliation was the blood of His cross, *“And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”* Col 1:20 Jesus’ death on the cross is proof that there is no limit to which God will not go and is the ultimate proof of His love.

So how does one come in contact with the blood of Christ? The blood of Jesus was shed in His death, *“But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”* John 19:34 Paul in turn tells us how one takes advantage of Christ’s sacrificial death, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,*

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even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Rom 6:3-4

Many of those who heard Peter’s sermon on Pentecost believed, yet recognized they were not saved. In fact, they recognized that they were not just sinners, but guilty of a horrifying atrocity – crucifying God’s only begotten Son (Acts 2:37). Peter instructed these believers to *“repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.”* Acts 2:38 That day 3,000 were baptized to come into contact with Christ’s redeeming blood and were forgiven.

If sin separates us from God, what must a Christian do when he sins? The answer is found in Acts 8:22 where Peter confronted Simon the Sorcerer after he had become a Christian and subsequently sinned. Throughout the New Testament many warnings are given to Christians about falling from grace (Heb 3:12-14; 4:1, 11; 1 Cor 10:12; Gal 5:4). The Bible plainly says that baptized believers can err from the truth (James 5:19), or be overtaken in a trespass (Gal 6:1). We jeopardize our inheritance in heaven if we stubbornly refuse to turn from sin and pray for God’s forgiveness (1 John 1:7-10). But when we repent and pray, God promises to forgive.

Peter told Simon in Acts 8:22, *“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.”* At baptism Simon was forgiven of all previous sins (Acts 2:38). How-

ever, his subsequent desire for the Apostles’ power to confer spiritual gifts was a grievous sin (Peter said, “You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.” Ac 8:21) and he stood guilty before God. The blood of Christ made his forgiveness possible, but he had to meet certain conditions to obtain forgiveness.

It was not necessary for Simon to be re-baptized. He was told to, “repent and pray.” Simon’s forgiveness was based on his repentance, sorrowfully turning away from his sin, and beseeching God through prayer for forgiveness. From this powerful example we learn that we who have been baptized are to pray with repentant hearts for the forgiveness of sin. Simon asked Peter to pray for him and we likewise may ask brethren to pray on our behalf.

God, through His marvelous grace, will grant us forgiveness. There is no uncertainty regarding God’s willingness to forgive a Christian’s sins if we meet His conditions. John wrote, *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:7-9. He is faithful to forgive us because He is God. He is just because He gave His Son to die for our sins. God justly forgives us, because Christ paid the penalty that was due.



Jesus' Teaching on Forgiveness

Dick Dabney

Could you find any greater authority on forgiveness than Jesus Christ, the Master? The experience of Jesus reaches from the holiness of deity to the weak and failing character of man. He knows God's nature in ways we can't even find thoughts to ask about. And He knows the foibles of mankind's condition, the despair of our lives when we stumble and fall over and over. He knows Satan on a level beyond this world, but He knows we can't use Satan's evil as our excuse. He cares for us so much that He would go to incredible measures to make it possible for us to be redeemed from our failures . . . to be forgiven.

So it's very special when we can hear this one of supreme power and authority speak to us about forgiveness, to give us insight so we can better understand God's standards and be able to make application in our own life's journey. Remember that Jesus came on the religious scene after about 400 years of God's silence among His people. It's predictable that, through the previous generations, the Jews had developed their religious standards based on their own ability to interpret the Law and to make case-by-case applications.

Unfortunately, the best effort of man without God's wisdom will miss the mark. And so we find that the stilted system developed by the Jews taught them to "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matt. 5:43) and to speculate about the limit of forgiveness (Lk. 17:3-5; Matt. 18:21 ff)

God allowed time for the Jewish religious leaders to develop their system of religious conclusions, revealing a self-serving character that is always a shortcoming of man's counsel. And in the "fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4), God delivered to them Jesus the Messiah, who so clearly pointed out the difference between their wisdom and the Father's.

Lord's Prayer

The starting point, perhaps, is to recognize that we all will stand before God in need of His powerful and precious forgiveness. Jesus taught His disciples in the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:9-15) to petition for forgiveness "as we have also forgiven" those around us. He further explained (verses 14-15) that the Father expects to see our forgiving heart, and without our own heart of forgiveness we should not expect the Father to be forgiving toward us. The challenge at times might be our tendency to think ourselves superior to the other person . . . after all (we might think), he is the one who caused the offense. But Jesus teaches us not to think ourselves too good to extend forgiveness. Apart from

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God's grace, after all, we should only see ourselves as "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," as the Lord admonished the Laodicea church of Christ (Rev.3:17).

Crucifixion

And ultimately the Savior put His words into pure practice in His crucifixion, when He asked the Father to forgive those who were putting Him to death. Although Jesus was absolutely superior, and could have enlisted overwhelming power to stop the events, He knew the hearts of those carrying out the sentence, that they genuinely didn't understand the magnitude of this event. The Roman centurion (Lk. 23:47) is even recorded with his own recognition, too late to change the course of action. As God knows the hearts of all men, He knows the just and right way to deal with a man truly acting in ignorance (Prov. 24:12). Jesus let forgiveness have its place, just as He had taught in His ministry.

Golden Rule

The very succinct "Golden Rule" is especially profound when we consider the notion of forgiveness. In Luke's account of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, we hear, "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Lk. 6:31). In this concept, followers of Jesus should hear that the first order is to be ready with our own forgiveness for the other person . . . not in response, but whenever it's needed. Do you want others to be ready to forgive

when you have caused an offense? God's wisdom teaches us to have that heart first in ourselves. This is excellent territory to pose the question, "What if everyone acted like I act?"

Forgive, and With Compassion

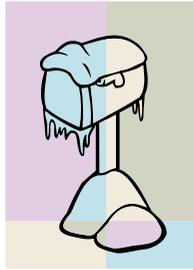
Jesus knew his disciples wondered about the extent of our forgiveness. After all (when our eyes are on ourselves), we grow weary of those who intrude over and over with offensive behavior. The Lord instructed about our relationships (Lk. 17:3-5) that offenses will certainly occur, and we may find it necessary to address the issue with the one who caused the offense. But when that person recognizes his error and commits to change, he is due our forgiveness. And even beyond, our forgiving spirit is to prevail regardless of how many times the person may trouble our lives. The Lord's teaching in Matthew 18:21-35 goes further to emphasize our forgiveness to be combined with true compassion, as we understand our Father extends to us.

Your Standard of Measure

The Master's teaching on forgiveness is closely intertwined with the matter of judgment. As we are challenged by others around us, we must be reminded of the state of our own failures and offenses before holy God. He teaches us to be forgiving as we yearn to be forgiven ourselves. Do you want to be free from the burden of

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God's condemnation? Reflect on Matthew 7:2 and in Luke 6:36-38, where the Master admonishes "by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return," and "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."



Principles of Forgiveness

Phil Lumpkin

We've discussed God's forgiving nature and Jesus' teachings along with His marvelous example. As we've progressed, we've also noted several recurring aspects of forgiveness that let's restate in the form of principles to guide and govern our practice of forgiveness.

Forgiveness should be freely given. When you think about it, forgiveness is one of those things that can only be given. It can't be effectively demanded or coerced, although it may be sought. Forgiveness is a divine quality that overflows from a loving heart; our hearts when we place the genuine interest of others ahead of self. The psalmist wrote, "*O Lord, Thou didst show favor to Thy land; Thou didst restore the captivity of Jacob. Thou didst forgive the iniquity of Thy people; Thou didst cover all their sin.*" Ps 85:1-2 and "*For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to for-*

give, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon Thee." Ps 86:5 Just as our heavenly Father stands ready to forgive us, we likewise should be eager to forgive those who trespass against us.

Joseph left us a marvelous example of forgiveness in Genesis chapter 50. We're familiar with the mistreatment Joseph endured at the hands of his brothers. Lesser men might have borne a grudge and tried to get even for the wrong suffered. After their fathers' death, Joseph's brothers humbled themselves and came to Joseph saying "*please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.*" As the ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, he could have dealt with them harshly, but the scriptures say that he wept, he embraced them, comforted them, spoke kindly to them and promised to care for them – he freely forgave them.

Forgiveness should be absolute. Some things are just all or none, such as what John recorded, "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.*" 1 Jn 1:5 The very nature of God is light, truth and holiness. He simply wouldn't be God if He weren't like this. Likewise, when we talk about forgiveness, we are speaking about all or none. If forgiveness is to be extended to heal a broken relationship, then partial forgiveness leaves us with a bandaged, but still broken relationship.

David wrote, "*I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said,*

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'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.' Ps 32:5 What would be the result if after acknowledging and confessing his sins, God spurned him or chose to only partially forgive David's sins? Consider David's sin with Bathsheba, what if God chose to only forgive his sin of adultery, but not the murder of Uriah? At the very least, David would still be lost in sin. His relationship with God would still be broken. Furthermore, David might be hesitant to pour out his heart before God in the future. When we repent and ask God's forgiveness, He forgives completely. David again wrote, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* Ps 103:12 Let's also make our forgiveness just as absolute and complete.

Forgiveness should be unlimited. A recent TV insurance commercial touts a company's "accident forgiveness" policy. That sounds good, the commercial's message resonates with us. We're human, we know we goof up, have accidents in life, we sin. And when we do, we crave forgiveness. Likewise, when someone sins against us, those with humble, penitent hearts also crave our forgiveness. And possibly not just once, but over and over again.

Note Peter's question to Jesus. *"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"* Jesus said to him, *'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times*

seven.'" Matt 18:21-22 Sometimes this is hard to practice, even with those whom we deeply love. But Jesus also said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* John 14:15 The God of heaven forgives us over and over; we are wholly dependent on His forgiving nature. As thankful recipients of His forgiveness, then let's resolve to forgive as often as our brethren ask, without reservation or conditions and regardless of what he/she may have done. The offending party's responsibility is to acknowledge guilt and seek forgiveness. The offended party's responsibility is to forgive – as often as necessary. Even when the offender shrinks from their responsibility, let's make sure they know we're ready and eager to forgive.

Forgiveness is commanded. As it turns out, you and I as children of God have been commanded to forgive. In fact our own forgiveness is conditional upon forgiving others – forgive and we will be forgiven. Do not forgive and we will not be forgiven. In Jesus' model prayer He said, *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Matt 6:12 In essence He prayed for God to forgive us in like measure to how we forgive others. Then He went on in verses 14 & 15 to make this point even clearer. *"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."* This straight-

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forward teaching is painfully blunt for anyone who doesn't have a forgiving heart, but blissfully comforting to those who forgive from the heart. The benefit is two-fold. We can expect forgiveness from our brethren, as well as from our heavenly Father. Loving Jesus means that we will practice His commandment to forgive.

When forgiven, let's be thankful. There is no greater gift than our forgiveness of sin and the guilt of sin. God, in sacrificing His only begotten Son, paid a terrible price for our forgiveness and this should bring us to our knees with hearts overflowing with thanksgiving. Paul told the Ephesians to, *"always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."* Eph 5:20 The Hebrew writer also wrote, *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."*



My Forgiveness

Lauri Mullins

When I was given the task of writing about "My Forgiveness" I was somewhat at a loss. Having been raised in a Christian home, there was never a real feeling of being in a "lost condition" in the first place. Everyone in "my world" already believed in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Right and wrong were clearly defined and everyone went to church. We got together for bible studies, singings and gospel meetings held at local congregations. We knew who the weaker brothers were, and that we had to set good examples for them and the lost.

So when I reached a certain age and my mother began to bring up the subject, I went ahead and got baptized. After all, I knew I was a sinner, I did believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and I knew it was what God and Mother wanted. I was now a Christian! But somehow nothing had really changed. My life kept going on just like it had before. After several more years, a feeling of guilt began to emerge about the shallowness of my conversion, and I was baptized again.

But that "joy of the Lord" feeling I was looking for didn't seem to be there. Something was missing. I would hear others speak about their love for Jesus and how happy they felt. They would talk about Him as if He were really alive and not just an icon; that He was their Savior and Master and not just a symbol representing a religion. I knew what they were expressing, I wasn't possessing. And it made me feel empty inside. Instead, I fell into legalism. I wasn't grateful; I was great-filled: Patting myself on the back that I loved God more than others; that I went to the right church; and that the only reason others had problems was because they just didn't

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love God enough. My prayers usually consisted of saying “I’m sorry” for my latest sin so that I wouldn’t go to hell. You see, its not that I really wanted to go to heaven, its just I really didn’t want to go to hell.

The real problem, as I see it, was I didn’t appreciate the Gift given to me. Some people refer to it as “cheap grace”. Jesus’ sacrifice was a story I knew very well, since childhood. But it no longer held any power for me. It had become as stale as a package of half-opened Matzo crackers that someone forgot to put away. The joy for “My Forgiveness” from sin was eluding me.

But thank goodness the message about the mercy and loving-kindness of God finally sank into me during a study on Grace. Understanding about God’s true nature resulted in deep appreciation of “My Forgiveness”. I was liberated! For the first time I read my Bible all the way through. And as I read, a funny thing began to happen... I began to change inside. The more I explored, the more I adored; the more I read, the more I wanted to be fed. I delighted in spending time in prayer and would go on long walks just talking to Him. The realization of the genuine love that God had bestowed on me by offering His Son for “My Forgiveness” resulted into the same type of joy that I had witnessed in others. I now was not going to worship services because I had to, but because I wanted to give back to Him for what He’d

done for me.

So, you say, what has all of this got to do with the subject of “My Forgiveness”? Well here it is: Until we understand that “God first loved us while we were yet sinners”; Until we reach the realization that we all are only “unworthy servants” and that our life is not our own; until the idea of finding something of such value that it sets us back on our heels in amazement smacks us upside the head, there will never be any real lasting change in our hearts or behavior. The fruits of “My Forgiveness” will not result in “passing-it-on” to others because the gift just won’t mean that much to me. I might look good on the outside, but I will never be energized beyond the level of mediocrity. I will still hold back and not give my best because I still believe my life is my own.



Forgiving Others

Kelly Johnson

Many people ask, how often shall I forgive? Some with pure motives and some not. It is an important question that affects not only our relationship with those we perceive as having wronged us, but also our relationship with God. It is important enough that God leaves us instruction

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in His word on how to deal with forgiving one another.

Peter approached the Lord and asked this question of him in Matt 18:21-22.

The answer was clear and concise, we are to forgive “up to seventy times seven”. It would be a mistake to get wrapped up in an analysis of the numbers involved. Seventy times seven is intended to convey a large number beyond normal expectation. It means that there is no stopping point on our requirement to forgive one another.

In Matthew the 6th chapter in verses 14 and 15 we see a clear statement of God’s view of our forgiveness of others. God will not allow us to hold on to the sins of others and have our sins removed. God will charge us with the entirety of our guilt if we insist on retaining the guilt of others.

It really makes sense when you think about it, why should we be afforded the removal of the guilt for our transgressions if we are not willing to give others the same gift? God extends grace to us because we need it to be in a relationship with Him. He expects us to show the same love and care for others as He shows to us.

In Matthew 18:23-35 Jesus teaches about forgiving others through a parable:

23 *"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "And when he had begun to set-*

tle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

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The teaching here is clear, we are to treat others with the tender mercy that God has shown us. Failure to do so invites God's judgment of our transgressions. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." In order to please God we must find it in our hearts to forgive others. This is God's way and it should be our way as well.

In the book of Luke we can see more teaching on this subject, in chapter seventeen, starting in verse 1 going through verse 4 we read that it is inevitable that we will cause each other distress from time to time. We often look at these verses from the perspective of not becoming the stumbling block to others, but we should not fail to see the other side of this teaching, we are to forgive when asked to do so by those who have wronged us in some way.

Forgiving others is sometimes difficult. Our feelings of hurt and betrayal can be immobilizing forces that stop us from forgiving. We hold on to our grievances, convinced that the offending party does not deserve to be forgiven. We need only look to Jesus to see that forgiving is not based on the offender's attitude or actions.

Jesus, when he was being crucified, asked that God forgive His assailants. In Luke 23, verses 33 and 34 we read *"33 And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying,*

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves."

Some of God's ordinances may seem hard to understand, but this one seems clear and easy. God wants us to treat others with the same care and grace that He affords us. We are to be like Him in all ways possible. Failure to strive for that goal can have catastrophic consequences for our soul.



Forgiving Ourselves

Megan Sweet

We've heard all of our lives, "Forgive and Forget", but how easy is it for us to do so? We are told God does, but does He? If God forgives us, why can't we forgive ourselves? The Bible teaches us that God forgives and does not remember our sin from that point forward. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34b ESV). From this, we can see that we also should do the

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same, but it is still a difficult task. How can we be confident that we should forgive ourselves?

Dr. James Dobson, a popular psychologist, suggests that not forgiving ourselves is an act of pride and ungratefulness¹. He states that, “[Not forgiving yourself] places one’s own evaluation over God’s, and when we’ve been forgiven by others, it says that their forgiveness is not adequate.” We would never want to put a limit on God, but by not forgiving ourselves, we are saying that His forgiveness is not enough for our sin to be forgotten, and that we know better than He. There is no limit to God’s forgiveness for those who love Him and obey Him! In Psalm 103, David is praising God for His righteousness, compassion, love and His many other wonderful attributes. He knows that God is merciful and powerful and is able to forgive transgressions. “As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). In John, Jesus forgives a woman caught in the act of adultery. On the cross, Jesus forgave those who were crucifying Him. We should know that our sins are forgiven, and go forward with our lives giving God the glory for healing our iniquities. We should go forward, confident that we are forgiven!

1 John 1:9 states that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God forgives us when we are truly sorry about the sin we have com-

mitted and have confessed it to Him. It is then up to us to forget about it ourselves. Those who dwell in the past will find it extremely difficult (if not impossible) to move forward in not only everyday life, but in their walk with God. Do we dwell in our mistakes and let them ruin our lives, or do we find the good that comes from learning from our past sins? Judas could not forgive himself and later killed himself because of the terrible guilt he carried for betraying Jesus. On the other hand, there are blessings all around us, even in troubling times. It is up to us to always see the blessings that God brings us, no matter how they are brought about. Whether we can use our experiences to help another, or use our new circumstance to bring more glory to God, there can always be a positive outcome. Could Judas have done great things if he had forgiven himself? He could have helped proclaim and spread the gospel! Instead, he dwelt on the past and the guilt overcame him. When Saul was converted on the way to Damascus, he was forgiven of his many sins. Before he was converted, he persecuted Christians and did not follow God. However, after learning the error of his ways and confessing that Jesus is the Christ and he had done wrong, God forgave him, and Saul (later Paul) learned to make his life good from that point forward. He began preaching and teaching others about Christ and telling them how they might make their lives better, and that anyone

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can overcome sin, no matter how “bad” it is. He endured many hardships for Christ, but still pressed on! Saul could have continued blind and in his sin, but his eyes were opened to see that the way he lived his life could be for good, and he could help makes others’ lives good too by bringing them to Christ! What a wonderful example of one who was so far from Christ, but was forgiven by God and able to forgive himself and turn his life around!

In conclusion, God forgives us and forever forgets our transgressions. We should not dwell on the past and beat ourselves up for that which we have been forgiven. When we are truly repentant, there is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed because we are made whole again by God’s forgiveness! What we do in the past does not define us, but rather how we let it affect our futures. It is up to us to forgive ourselves and move on to glorify God in everything we do!

¹ <http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/dobson45.html>



Consequences of Not Forgiving

Steven D. Baxley

The articles in this issue of The Sword have discussed various aspects of forgiveness. There remains yet one topic that needs to be addressed: the consequences

of the Christian not forgiving those who have sinned, especially those who have sinned against him.

The principle that God’s forgiveness is dependent upon our willingness to forgive others is taught in more than one place in the Scriptures. Notice what is found in what is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer: *“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”* Mt 6:12. Jesus then concludes his instructions with *“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Mt 6:14-15.

An almost identical statement, but not stated as a part of the Lord’s Prayer, can be found in the Gospel of Mark: *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”* Mk 11:25-26.

If we fail to forgive those who have wronged us, then we cannot count on God forgiving us for the wrongs we have committed against Him. This goes to the very heart of God’s justice. He expects us to deal with our fellow human beings in the same way that He has dealt with us. We should remember that if we go into eternity without forgiveness from God, the re-

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sults for us will be much worse than anything that can happen here on earth because we do not forgive those who sin against us. Our actions (or lack thereof) here will echo in eternity.

It is also interesting that both Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25-26 are stated in the context of prayer. I wonder if we as Christians understand that an unforgiving attitude will have a direct effect, not only on how God views us, but also on how He views our prayers? A prayer for God's forgiveness, when we have not forgiven others, is hypocritical, and is an abomination before the throne of God.

Beyond this principle, the Bible is clear that forgiving others is a command of God. Notice please Luke 17:3-4: *"Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."* Notice how clear and definite the command is: *"you must forgive him."* If we fail to do what Jesus has commanded, then we have sinned against Him.

This thought was repeated in the New Testament by later writers as well. In Colossians 3:13, Paul tells the saints in Colossae that among the necessary traits of a Christian is a forgiving heart: *"forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."* A similar thought is also expressed in Ephesians 4:32: *"Be kind to one another, tender-*

hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." If we as Christians do not forgive others, then we have failed to show the characteristics in our lives that God expects to see!

James taught the principle that the unmerciful will not receive mercy: *"For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."* James 2:13

Isn't it interesting that the consequences of not forgiving others are so great that not only did Jesus emphasize it in His teaching while on earth, but it continued to be emphasized in the writings of His apostles directed to members of the Lord's Church?

One last thought to remember concerning the consequences of not forgiving: one lesson of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) concerns the attitude of the older brother, who was angry and not willing to forgive his younger brother. The father's attitude towards his older son was summed up with the words: *"It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."* Lk 15:32 If God can forgive sinners, and be joyful when doing so, then our forgiveness should be quick, heartfelt, and accompanied with joy for that person!



Forgiven



God forgives us
Our sins washed away
He remembers them no more
When first we obey



We forgive each other
Seventy times seven
Confessing our sins
Our goal to be in heaven



The more we love
The more we are forgiven
We sing praises to God
God opens the door to heaven



How many times
Will God forgive His children
If we are to forgive
Seventy times seven

Look how God forgave
His chosen people
And know that He will
Know He forgives today

Aileen Fancher